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ABSTRACT

Recruitment and retention of special education teachers and related services staff have been persistent problems of rural school districts nationwide. High teacher attrition rates have serious ramifications for personnel development and program stability. Effective recruitment strategies for rural areas have four main components: (1) emphasis on qualities of rural schools and communities that reinforce intrinsic motivations and meet teachers' social, self-esteem, and self-actualization needs; (2) appeal to persons with lifestyles, interests, and attitudes consistent with local cultural norms; (3) use of individualized "hot buttons," such as advertising the rural lifestyle as an escape from urban problems or using the "Peace Corps" approach; and (4) "selling" the school district through creative marketing techniques. Teachers who stay in a rural area typically have goals, mores, expectations, and lifestyles similar to those of local residents. Thus, the school district must develop means of helping new staff to acclimate. Teacher orientation could involve pairing with an experienced teacher or with another staff person who has successfully relocated. Other effective retention strategies are:. (1) involving newcomers in community-related activities; (2) faculty exchange programs; (3) inservice incentive systems; (4) special challenges or assignments; (5) merit increases or other approaches to recognize extraordinary performance; and (6) stress reduction activities. Regional interagency systems for recruiting and retaining rural educators are needed to provide educational forecasting and needs assessment, communication networking, and links to universities. (SV)

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PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

IN RURAL AMERICA

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PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION
IN RURAL AMERICA

I. Personnel Recruitment and Retention - A National Problem

Problems recruiting and retaining special education and related services staff in rural areas have been verified by two studies of the National Rural Research and Personnel Preparation Project (NRP). A 1978-79 study involving research in 19 state education agencies discerned that 94% of all participating states experienced severe difficulties recruiting and retaining personnel to serve rural handicapped children (Helge, 1981).

A 1980 NRP study involved 75 school districts and cooperatives in 17 states in an effort to compare rural service delivery systems before and after implementation of PL 94-142. Areas reported to be most problematic for rural LEAs and cooperatives were recruiting and retaining professional staff. Almost two-thirds (64%) of all respondents reported recruitment problems and almost one-half (48%) reported retention problems as critical areas of difficulty (Helge, 1980).

It was noted that many rural districts were compelled to hire young and inexperienced special education staff members. Social and cultural isolation were factors cited which caused most of these teachers to abandon rural schools as soon as openings occurred in more urban settings. Some states estimated an annual teacher turnover rate of 30-50% with almost complete turnover every three years. Attrition rates such as these have serious ramifications for personnel development and program stability.

Social isolation, extreme weather conditions, inadequate housing, and low salaries created conditions that made it difficult to employ special education staff in many rural schools. Many positions remained unfilled for months and others for years.

Under these conditions, it was reported that personnel development, difficult enough in rural areas given a stable personnel force, seldom reached beyond basic orientation to district and state philosophies. Constant turnover rendered it virtually impossible to develop and implement long-range plans for staff improvement. High attrition necessitated new personnel development programs every year or two.

Factors such as these combined with stresses of implementing new roles and responsibilities, problems of working with parents of handicapped students, increased staff time and paper-work requirements, and other problems such as lack of appropriate or modified curricula. These variables were reported as contributing to morale problems and an acute level of teacher "burn-out."

One significant finding of the 1978-79 NRP study was that the lack of social and cultural opportunities frequently inhibited staff retention more than the lack of professional opportunities. However, inadequate staff development programs were also identified as a critical variable regarding staff attrition.

Retention and recruitment are problematic across all disability categories and all types of communities. Currently, urban (and particularly inner city) schools are experiencing severe problems recruiting and retaining specialized personnel. For example, in a March 25, 1981 issue of Education of the Handicapped, a study indicated that New York City was unable to fill 1,000 special education teaching positions. The

total field of special education is currently seeking teachers for thousands of unfilled positions.

One aspect of the larger perspective that must be maintained is the changing market--many students who might previously have majored in education are currently majoring in business. This is particularly true of female students who in the past may have been culturally or academically advised more frequently into education majors. Likewise, professional burn-out is becoming an increasing phenomenon in many occupations, not only special education and related services fields. Rural schools located in communities in which professional resources of all kinds are scarce are particularly negatively impacted by recruitment and retention problems.

II. Successful Recruitment Strategies

Effective recruitment strategies for rural areas have four main components: (1) the use of intrinsic motivators, (2) consideration of local cultural norms, (3) tapping individualized "hot buttons," and (4) selling one's district.

Appealing to intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations. Many recruitment efforts concentrate on extrinsic motivations such as salary level, attractive facilities, and the availability of equipment. Most appeals of that type are relatively low on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. (See Figure 1 below.) Although sometimes it is essential for a recruiter to address lower levels of Maslow's Hierarchy (e.g., providing temporary housing in areas with no teacherages, hotels, or other options), professional literature indicates that recruiters should primarily address the higher aspects of motivation depicted in Figure 1. (Maslow, 1954, Thompson, 1975).

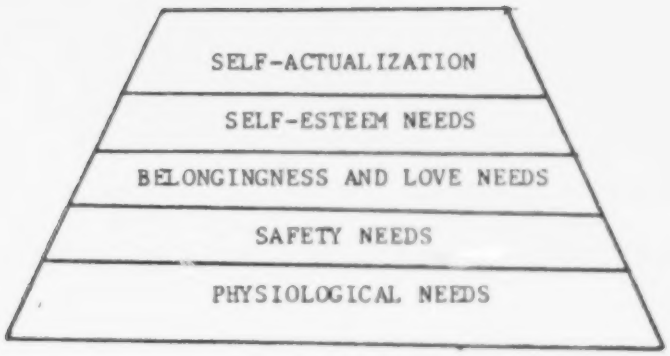

Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

The Lortie study (1975) dealt with occupational motivations for teachers. Findings indicated that teachers entered this vocation because of reinforcements they received from students and peers and not because of extrinsic motivators such as salary levels. These motivations and human needs clearly indicate needs for recruiters to focus on potentials for prospective employees to enhance self-esteem, self-actualize, and meet socialization needs (the higher levels of Maslow's Hierarchy).

Because teachers enter the field of education specifically to work with students, a follow-up to the Lortie study conducted by Morrisey and Safer (1979) indicated that paperwork and other requirements inhibiting teacher-student interaction led to teacher dissatisfaction. Thus, prospective employers would want to emphasize aspects of jobs for which they are recruiting personnel that facilitate interactions with students and minimize administrative and clerical responsibilities.

Specifically, interviewers would want to focus on aspects of Maslow's Hierarchy such as those listed in figure 2 below:

Figure 2

Maslow's Need Areas	Sample Recruitment Foci
Social Needs (e.g., love, affection, and recognition)	Friendliness of small communities Potential for status available in the prospective community
Self-Esteem Needs	Flexible programming to work in one's own interest area Small enrollments facilitating individual attention to students District foci on quality education programs
Self-Actualization Needs	Administrative support for professional growth and development Peer support environments Professional growth opportunities Any special self-development opportunities available such as proximities to professional libraries or extended universities

A sincerely interested interviewer is invaluable. This type of person is skilled in active listening techniques and has basic positive feelings for the geographic area and community for which he is recruiting personnel. Interviewees respond more to individuals and their styles and skills than to theie positions or the content they represent.

Interviewees frequently make occupational choices based on their affect. Potentially 80% of all behavior is attitudinally based (Bennis, 1971). Thus recruitees will frequently select jobs after considering whom they might feel comfortable working with and receive reinforcement from. Interviewers should provide descriptions or nuances of potential informal and formal peer support groups. This is typically a much stronger attraction than verbiage concerning available facilities and equipment.

Consideration of local cultural norms. It is imperative in rural areas to plan recruitment strategies that will attract personnel with values consonant with local rural subcultures. Recruiting people with lifestyles, interests and attitudes consistent with local cultural norms lessens the likelihood of staff becoming dissatisfied and unsuccessful in their jobs. A study by Marrs (1968) found that unsuccessful teachers were teachers who described themselves as "bored," and "not intellectually stimulated. NRP data have clearly indicated that mobile rural teachers dissatisfied with the communities in which their jobs are located frequently leave those jobs even if they are professionally satisfied.

The 1978-79 NRP study found tremendous resistance to change in rural areas (88% of all states involved in the study) and suspicion of outside interference (72% of all states involved). Thus, consideration of local attitudes becomes especially important when recruiting persons to be change agents or for positions in which they are consultants to persons indigenous to the rural community. In view of the statistics cited above regarding rural affect, recruiters should be wary of persons who see themselve as "instant change agents."

The recruiter would want to carefully look at the degree to which candidates for employment (1) would be accepting of rural culture, (2) have behaviors appropriate for the environment in which they will be living, (3) have generic skills if that is required in the rural area (as it is in most), (4) have interests consistent with local lifestyles, (5) have knowledge or at least an interest in gaining knowledge of the local community and its communication and political systems and history, (6) have abilities to adapt to different living conditions, and (7) have

existent or the ability to develop local and long distance support systems (particularly important in isolated and sparsely populated areas).

Careful screening of potential staff members who are unfamiliar with rural areas and certain types of rural subcultures should occur to determine their interests, aptitudes, and personal goals and to evaluate them with regard to compatibility with those of the local area.

For example, interviewers in areas in which blizzards or other inclement weather force long periods of isolation might identify job candidates who are self-entertainers. Similarly, interviewers for school systems which reinforce cooperation and are hostile toward competition might eliminate through screening mechanisms those applicants who are catalysts for competitiveness.

Some administrators have employed informal checklists when interviewing persons external to their community which included some of the following questions:

1. Will the interviewee's personal traits and goals be compatible with those in the area and not make him susceptible to criticism and vulnerable to the close vigil of many rural areas?

2. Can the community provide the necessary social opportunities for this applicant who is interested in the professional opportunities in the district?

3. Will the position provide a realistic challenge to the applicant?

4. Does the applicant have hobbies or other avocational interests which initiate self-entertainment and self-sufficiency? (This characteristic has been found to be particularly relevant in isolated or remote rural areas.)

5. Is the applicant willing to listen and genuinely interested in learning about the unique aspects of this particular community?

6. Is the applicant flexible enough to cross interdisciplinary and position lines as required in an area of scarce specialized resources?

7. Is the applicant able to cooperate with people with different viewpoints?

8. Is the applicant flexible enough to assess attributes of the community and produce educational resources using currently existent systems?

Adept rural administrators have also realized the value of balancing their established staff with residents who understand their particular subculture and with newcomers who can offer unique cultural perspectives. This philosophy lends itself to effective retention strategies such as pairing indigenous staff and newcomers as described in a later section.

Tapping individualized "hot buttons." A common practice for years in rural schools has involved hiring teachers reared in rural areas and thereby reducing the cultural shock commonly experienced by external entrants. In some cases, this strategy has resulted in less qualified staff or a culturally limited perspective being available to rural children. For example, in some of the districts in sparsely populated ranching country, 2-25 children spend their entire educational career with one teacher.

Interviewers interested in hiring persons not indigenous to the rural area would want to identify individualized needs and motivations of interviewees in ways consistent with Maslow's Hierarchy. For example, if a person is currently most motivated by his/her own professional goals, the individual recruiting would want to explain all opportunities for staff development and possibilities for advancement.

Some rural schools and states have effectively used competition as a motivator to attract people to small communities which, often out of necessity, live via cooperative efforts. This approach has frequently been combined with the attraction of living in scenic rural communities with less hurried lifestyles, little traffic, low pollution indices and opportunities related to open or unspoiled terrain. One successful state advertised its rural positions in newspapers of urban cities with high pollution indices, travel problems, and other metropolitan characteristics including a myriad of dissatisfied teachers and specialists hoping to "escape" for a unique experience they could relate to their friends.

Several of the districts in this state received thousands of applications each year for many of their one-room schoolhouses in very isolated areas. As their advertisements further stated that only the most qualified applicants would be considered and personnel selected could only stay two years so that others might share their culture and perspectives with the students, competition increased for the few jobs offering this experience.

Other districts called institutions of higher education and requested names of the highest ranking graduates in the field in which personnel were needed. School administrators then called the recommended graduates, explaining their penchant for quality and why they were interested in that particular graduate.

One benefit of early incorporation of individualized "hot button" strategies such as those described above is the potential for discovering more about the prospective employee before he or she is hired. Continual focus on such individualized motivators will pay benefits in staff retention.

Selling one's district. One of the reasons for the success of the entrepreneur, Dale Carnegie, and his well-known sales techniques is the recognition that "packaging" is 80% of marketing a product (Carnegie, 1936).

Creativity in actually marketing one's district or cooperative is essential in this decade of recruitment difficulties. Many rural districts are discovering that they are competing with higher-paying potential employers in business and other fields.

Although rural school environments inherently possess a number of problems for the education of handicapped children, they also offer a number of unique resources. For example, the concept of "community spirit" still lives in rural America. Rural people sincerely care about one another and are usually willing to do whatever they can to assist others who are in need. In addition, rural districts are typically blessed with a void of the bureaucratic barriers to service prevalent in urban schools.

It is fairly well recognized that many positive aspects of rural life may simultaneously function negatively. For example, one key strength of rural areas is the true sense of community and family interdependence with the school. This relevancy and interdependence between home, school, and work can be extremely supportive to handicapped students, facilitating opportunities for mutually sharing school and community resources.

Concomitantly, the personalization of all social, political, and private relationships of educators' lives (Gjelten, 1978) frequently makes school personnel feel vulnerable. Without effective, continuous staff development including stress reduction, a relatively high rate of

teacher burnout may result as rural staff are asked to be "all things to all people."

The most effective recruitment techniques will exploit all resources of rural areas to the maximum extent possible. A skillful recruiter will attempt to convert adverse circumstances into assets wherever possible before, during, and after recruitment interviews. In an interview situation, this could mean selling the challenge of working in a community whose children are predominantly of low socioeconomic backgrounds (thus addressing the self-esteem or self-actualization levels of Maslow's Hierarchy). Many districts find that they recruit the best personnel by offering such challenges. In fact, some districts have called this a "Peace Corps" approach and have "sold" this leadership potential to potential recruits.

Another "negative characteristic" that can be turned into a positive variable is the typical composition of rural communities. Many rural districts contain large numbers of older/retired persons who are not heavy contributors to the tax base. Although frequently such individuals are uninformed about school needs and programs and inhibit passage of bond issues, they may also be avid school supporters and have been excellent sources of specialized or nonprofessional manpower. Retired individuals often have sufficient stature to effect community support for a program in which they become involved.

One selling point of rural districts during this decade should be the heavy voluntary migration into rural areas. Phenomenal growth has occurred in rural areas and, in fact, the migratory patterns from rural areas to the cities has been reversed (Beale, 1978).

Many districts find it helpful to incorporate local community groups and potential support systems into packaged recruitment materials. Strategies of this nature include having groups other than the local district or cooperative featured on brochures or letterhead so that the potential recruitee has a feeling of belonging to the larger community.

Many rural communities have involved local businesses, welcome wagons, civic clubs, and other groups in their actual recruiting processes and interviews. Such groups have frequently assisted schools in finding potential interviewees by having records of individuals taking new positions in their communities. The friendliness exhibited by some of these groups has frequently facilitated hiring processes.

Neighboring rural districts frequently are being compelled to compete with one another for personnel. Small differences in presentations between districts can amount to considerable differences in success rates (e.g., using different colors of paper for flyers, etc.).

Even though the potential recruiter does best by emphasizing intrinsic motivators, there are obviously times when extrinsic motivators must be addressed. Some districts have worked with the U. S. Department of Agriculture and other agencies to secure low-cost staff housing as a permanent solution to this very basic level of Maslow's Hierarchy (and essentially an extrinsic motivation). Other districts have provided teacherages or houses attached to the school in which the person will teach.

When inhibitors to job satisfaction are essentially unchangeable variables or "givens," creativity becomes even more imperative. Consider the example of interviewing a person interested in eventual career

advancement to a supervisory position when the interviewing district has no possibilities for upward mobility. A recruiter constantly analyzing creative alternatives would establish relationships with administrative personnel in other districts so that a person could overtly be trained to gain experience in his or her rural district and move to another when ready for career advancement.

Since literature indicates that teachers are reinforced specifically by their students and not by activities such as paper-work which take them away from students, strategies may also need to be emphasized that mollify the necessity of clerical work. For example, some districts have used volunteers such as retired or unemployed certified teachers, CETA program workers, or other non-teaching personnel to assist teachers in completing non-instructional tasks.

III. Retention Strategies

Persons who tend to stay in a rural area typically are those who have similar goals, mores, expectations and lifestyles of those persons who have lived in the area for a long time. Thus, it is usually necessary for a school district to develop means of helping a new person acclimate.

It is extremely important to make new staff aware of the local power structure and community communication systems. Sometimes this means actually providing education to them about local cultures and how to assess communication and power systems.

Retention should be a focus at the time of the initial interview because of the relationship between retention and recruitment. Initial interviews should emphasize strategies the district uses to retain qualified effective personnel.

A view for long-term strategies to address unchangeable elements or "givens" is essential. Many districts have realized that monies spent for high school students likely to return to their home area or to re-tool current personnel are sound long-term investments. Similar basic philosophies must be incorporated to retain personnel--appealing to intrinsic motivations, considering local cultural norms, and incorporating a holistic philosophy concerning an individual staff member. Once an applicant from outside the area is selected, the districts' challenge is to orient him to the community and provide incentives that will enhance his desire to become an integral part of its citizenry. One successful orientation method is involvement of a district "old-timer" and a person who was also recruited to the district from another area when formally or informally educating the newcomer about the social mores of the area. The following have been found to be effective incentives for retaining qualified personnel:

1. Placing newcomers in leadership positions such as activities designed to enhance external cultural perspectives of faculty. (Many districts employing this strategy have spotlighted an indigenous leader simultaneously so that established power structures become supportive of the transplant.)

2. Initiating intra- or inter-district temporary faculty exchange programs.

3. Establishing inservice incentive systems including release time, college credit, and certificate renewal.

4. Providing special challenges or assignments, particularly when affiliated with pre- or in-service programs.

5. Establishing merit increases or other approaches to recognize extraordinary performance.

6. Initiating stress reduction activities ranging from desensitization to "venting," social functions, and physiological stress reduction exercises; and establishing local support systems for continuous stress reduction.

Many district administrators are frustrated about situations they cannot change such as lack of appropriate facilities for their staff and programs. After every attempt has been made to work through informal as well as formal systems of power to change such situations, one option is to enhance the status of individuals who are forced to undergo trying circumstances. For example, some administrators arrange for itinerant personnel to demonstrate their skills with children. Such support and reinforcement efforts create a sense of status designed to overcome factors such as lack of a permanent office or unpleasant facilities.

It is important to structure the initial experiences of persons new to a community for success, if possible. This may include establishing ways for newcomers to have pleasant social experiences and to publicize their achievements with certain types of children so that they are readily accepted by their peers.

As appropriate staff development programs are closely related to faculty retention, special attention must be given to enhancing incentives, accessibility, and quality of inservice programs. Many personnel from rural districts complain that there are inadequate opportunities for release time for them to be involved in formal and informal inservice opportunities. One field-tested practice for creatively using available resources in staff development is described below.

> A comprehensive Management Information System (MIS) was used to access school and community resources to enhance special education services through staff development. Processes of initiating this MIS are described below.
>
> 1. A needs assessment was conducted at the total school and individual classroom level.
>
> 2. A resource survey was conducted of all school personnel, listing skills and competencies that could be shared with others and/or used with

children with educational problems. Community and parent data were included in the MIS data base.

3. A manual card-sorting system or a computerized retrieval system linked identified resources and needs. Where possible, these data were related to identify needs of individual students. For example, a teacher who needed to see an effective demonstration of Task Analysis and implementation of Applied Behavior Analysis was linked with another teacher who used these skills regularly and effectively with handicapped and nonhandicapped students. These types of interchanges were facilitated by using retired teachers, parent volunteers, or unemployed certified teachers to manage classrooms while teachers observed other teachers in practice.

The process of asking school personnel and community volunteers their particular areas of expertise which could be shared with others was a complimentary approach which built favorable attitudes toward school leadership personnel. Simultaneously, an evolving foundation of school resources was established which could easily be accessed. This resource bank facilitated teacher growth and development and was an effective indirect teacher retention strategy. The MIS made it possible for release time for teachers to be involved in formal and informal inservice opportunities.

IV. Recruitment and Retention Resources Available at the National Level

Commonly, brochures and flyers addressed to university placement offices, state education agencies, contact persons, regional newsletters, informal grapevine systems, and formal job fairs have been used to gain access to potential candidates for recruitment. However, many job seekers relate that college placement offices and other information sources typically inform them only of positions in larger districts and towns. Simultaneously, some rural school positions remain open for several years due to lack of viable candidates applying for those positions.

A National Personnel Needs Data Bank was initiated in 1980 by the NRP. The NRP maintains an informal exchange for rural school districts

attempting to locate qualified special education personnel and support personnel interested in working in rural and remote areas. Listings of position openings are periodically featured in special editions of the NRP national newsletters. Position listings are also maintained in the offices of NRP for persons inquiring about such positions.

In the spring of 1981, the NRP also began to maintain listings of districts interested in personnel exchanges. Many staff morale problems have been attributed to the frequent rural staff turnover rates of 30-50% described earlier. The NRP Rural Personnel Exchange Data System was initiated to facilitate temporary staff exchanges among various rural districts across the United States.

The System manages exchanges of information between districts or special education cooperatives interested in offering opportunities for personnel to practice in their rural area on a temporary basis (typically one year) and individuals desiring to make such a short-term chamge. The system is an attempt to offer (1) alternatives for administrative, teaching, and support staff, particularly those who are likely to "burn out" if they are not allowed to experience a divergent practice setting for a short period of time; and (2) opportunities to infuse new ideas, perspectives, and cultural diversity into ongoing service delivery systems.

V. Conclusions

It is clear that there is a need for a system to be made available to rural school systems that will reduce the trauma of frequent recruiting while concurrently enhancing the professional lives of rural educators so that they will not constantly be seeking "greener pastures." Such a system should be an interagency undertaking including the resource capabilities of regional resource centers, state education agen-

cies, local education agencies and other groups. Federally funded projects such as the National Rural Project or the National Inservice Network (both funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education) can serve as catalysts. More permanent institutions should have the primary responsibility for ongoing maintenance of the system.

A system for recruiting and retaining rural educators should include at least three basic elements:

1. Forecasting - The system should be able to anticipate short- and long-term impact of such variables as attrition rates, related governmental trends, numbers of children anticipated in various grades and programs, the nature of the population (e.g., the types and numbers of handicapping conditions prevalent), facility needs, fiscal needs, and resources available.

2. Communication - The system should provide a communication network that clearly expresses the situation regarding agency needs and available resources, makes allied agencies aware of social and professional opportunities available to their personnel, articulates the goals and objectives of allied agencies, and provides a degree of coordination.

3. Linkage - This element of the system should match needs and resources such as linking universities with graduating teachers and schools needing these fledgling professionals. It should also link various networks and ad hoc organizations that have a vested interest in recruitment and retention of educators in rural schools.

It should be obvious that while the suggested system has many of the characteristics of state Comprehensive System of Personnel Development structures, the system as described would be much broader than the boundaries of any given state. However, it is likely that such systems could be regional in nature with a linkage function among specific regions.

Until such formal structures are developed, numerous agencies will of necessity undertake most of the activities independently. Numerous mini-systems will also continue to exist where local and state education

agencies, universities, and other systems independently forecast, communicate, and attempt linkage in ways that will meet their specific needs.

Summary

This paper has discussed a variety of strategies for recruiting and retaining personnel in rural school systems. It has stressed optimum use of the upper dimensions of Maslow's Hierarchy for recruiting personnel. It has suggested that formal recruitment and retention systems be established to serve the various agencies that prepare, employ, and provide services to educators in rural schools.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS AND RELATED RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Educators attending the Spring 1981 statewide Conference on Recruitment and Retention Techniques sponsored by the South Atlantic Regional Resource Center in cooperation with the Georgia State Education Agency listed the following as their personal motivators.

- Equilibrium between professional and personal life
- Continuous learning
- Jobs not routine (i.e., problems to solve)
- Reinforcement
- Challenges
- Crisis administration situations
- Autonomy
- Contact with kids
- Job satisfaction
- Support from staff
- Participation in decision-making

These participants then identified a number of "creative" recruitment strategies based on the kinds of things that they saw as motivators. These are listed below:

- Paying professional organization dues
- Adapting a Peace Corps approach
- Paying for interview expenses
- Initiating professional exchanges
- Creating talent bartering systems
- Locating adequate housing
- Sending interview teams to colleges
- Learning effective interviewing skills
- Arranging social functions
- Assisting with moving loans
- Arranging for interest-free loans before arrival of first paycheck
- Provising support person(s)
- Sending indigenous persons to college and pay tuition
- Building Chamber of Commerce support
- Establishing school board support
- Arranging for media output
- Creating higher than usual salary supplements
- Providing individual travel for itinerant teachers
- Creating intellectual stimulation
- Using existing placement services
- Making professional literature available

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